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ABSTRACT

This document presents the program transcripts of a weekly series broadcast by member stations of National Public Radio. The program focuses on food in the schools. It addresses the following issues: plate waste in Chicago and Dallas; banning junk food and vending machines; the results of a vending machine junk food ban in West Virginia; California students' reactions to the junk food ban; the back to basic food movement; and Nutricare, a book on how to rate food according to its nutritional value. (Author/AM)

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OPTIONS IN EDUCATION

PROGRAM TRANSCRIPTS OF A WEEKLY SERIES BROADCAST BY MEMBER STATIONS OF NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO

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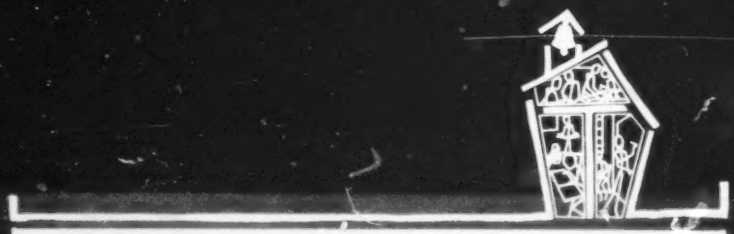

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UPO 17287

Program #75

FOOD IN THE SCHOOLS
PART I

April 26, 1977

FOOD IN THE SCHOOLS

PART I

"In America, you get food to eat.
Don't have to run through the jungle and scuff up your
feet . . ."

"Going to start the day the right way, the only way,
The 'get-up-and-go' way,
Going to have a bowl of them oats.
Going to get power, power, power
And good, good feelings
From cheer, cheer, Cheerios."

MERROW: I'm John Merrow.

BLAIR: I am Wendy Blair.

MERROW: And right now, we're going to talk about food.

BLAIR: NPR Reporter David Selvin went to the supermarket to find out what people know about the groceries they bring home.

SELVIN: Can you remember what you had for breakfast this morning?

WOMAN: Yeah. Bagel and cream cheese and coffee and juice.

SELVIN: Do you remember what you had for breakfast this morning?

CHILD: Bagel and apple juice.

SELVIN: I see that you've got Wonder bread. Do you mind if I pick this up?

WOMAN: No. Go ahead.

SELVIN: Let's see, ingredients in here . . . It's got calcium, propenate Do you have any idea what that is?

WOMAN: I think it's a preservative of some sort.

SELVIN: Do you look for those kinds of things when you buy food?

WOMAN: Well, I'm buying Wonder bread made with buttermilk because Consumer Report said this is one of the best white breads.

SELVIN: But you did look on the labels to see . . . .

WOMAN: I have looked, and I know there are lots of things in lots of food which isn't good. I just try to avoid them. I'm not sure I'm always successful.

MERROW: We also went to school and found out about plate waste and vending machines.

WOMAN: I think that for any ban to work on junk foods - there has to be some support not only from the school administrators, but also the teachers, the students and the parents. I think that we have to do more towards nutrition education.

WOMAN: It was found that we had about 11% milk waste and 8% bread waste, and 29% fruit and vegetable waste.

BLAIR: This week, OPTIONS IN EDUCATION reports on nutrition. What do you know about it? Stay tuned and you'll hear some of your favorite commercials; listen to angry participants in the vending machine controversy; and find out how lousy our own eating habits really are.

MERROW: People used to say, "You are what you eat." Now, the most popular saying may be, "If you can't pronounce it, don't eat it." But it's all part of the same idea. There's a growing awareness about food and what it does to us.

BLAIR: And a lot of parents are asking schools to get rid of junk food vending machines, provide nutritious meals, and teach children more about nutrition.

MERROW: What did you have for breakfast this morning, Wendy?

BLAIR: I had rolled oats and skimmed milk and cafe au lait with left-over coffee.

MERROW: I had a half a grapefruit, an English muffin and a cup of tea. Most of what we learn about food we learn from our parents. But they may not be such good teachers. Americans are among the most overfed people in the world, and, yet, millions of Americans suffer from malnutrition.

BLAIR: A recent report by the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs recommended that we reduce 40% of our consumption of sugar, and 50% to 85% of our consumption of salt. It also suggested that we eat less red meat, eggs and other foods high in cholesterol. That sounds bad.

MERROW: According to Dr. Ernest Wynder of the American Health Association, current evidence suggests that as much as 50% of all cancer in women and one-third of all cancer in men comes from our diets.

BLAIR: But diets are part of habit, and habit is hard to change.

MERROW: School seems like a logical place to teach children about food, but not much nutrition education goes on, and what does varies from state to state and school to school - mostly to girls in home economics classes in junior and senior high schools.

BLAIR: And by that time, eating habits are already formed.

MERROW: Let's rejoin David Selvin in a local supermarket.

IN THE SUPERMARKET

SELVIN: Do you have a favorite kind of food?

SHOPPER: Yes. Ice cream.

SELVIN: Just ice cream?

SHOPPER: Ice cream's my favorite food. I guess I'd eat as much as I could before I start getting sick!

SELVIN: Can you remember what you had for breakfast this morning?

SHOPPER: I usually don't have breakfast. What I have is Knox gelatin, orange flavored or grapefruit flavored.

SELVIN: That's pretty sparse.

SHOPPER: It's good for your nails though! It's better than juice.

SELVIN: How about lunch? Do you remember what you had for lunch?

SHOPPER: I usually don't eat lunch.

SELVIN: How about dinner last night?

SHOPPER: I make up for it at dinner. Last night I ate out. I had a steak and cheese sub with everything on it.

SELVIN: Let me take a look at what's in here. I'm sorry to snoop around. Ah-hah! Stouffers! I'm a sucker for this, too. Did you know that there was calcium lactate and something called xanthan gum.

SHOPPER: I believe it.

SELVIN: Do you know what those things are?

SHOPPER: Preservatives probably that are very, very bad.

SELVIN: Does that concern you at all?

SHOPPER: It does. In fact, the first thing I consider is what's in the item that I'm choosing. The second is the price. And I would more often choose something that's more expensive if it had no preservatives in it.

SELVIN: Are there any particular things that you know to stay away from - like sodium nitrites or things like that?

SHOPPER: Yeah, MSG, definitely, BHA, and all those other long names that I don't know what they are, but I know that they're preservatives.

SELVIN: Some of them, actually are fairly innocuous. Some of them don't hurt at all.

SHOPPER: Well, what I don't understand is if some items can be produced without these preservatives, why can't they all do it. You know. And if

they can do it, and if the food would taste the same, you know, I think some kind of legislation should start going in that direction.

SELVIN: You've got a lot of diet soda there. Doughnuts. Doughnuts!

SHOPPER: Very soon the diet soda is going off the market.

SELVIN: That's right. How do you feel about that?

SHOPPER: I have a lot of mixed feelings about it.

SELVIN: I mean, this is what you were talking about - government stepping in.

SHOPPER: Right. Exactly. On the other hand, you sort of resent the fact that government does tell you what to do. So, I think government's role really should be to warn the public of what the dangers are, and let the public decide for themselves what they, as individuals, want to choose to buy.

BLAIR: Reporter David Selvin talking with shoppers.

JUNK FOOD JUNKIE

by Larry Groce

You know I love that organic cooking.
I always ask for more.
And they call me "Mr. Natural"
On down to the Health Food Store.
I only eat good sea salt, white sugar don't touch my lips.
And my friends is always begging me to take 'em
on macrobiotic trips. Yes, they are.

At night I take out my strong box that I keep under lock and key.
And I take it off to my closet where nobody else can see.
I open that door so slowly, take a peek up North and South.
Then I pull out a Hostess Twinkie, and pop it in my mouth.

MERROW: That popular song is called "Junk Food Junkie." Junk food and the vending machines that sell it are causing controversy around the country. We'll hear more about it later in the program.

BLAIR: The first Federally-funded school lunch program began in 1946. Twenty years later, in 1966, the Child Nutrition Act created the school breakfast program. Now, in 1977, the Feds spend over $4 billion on both programs with the stated aim "to safeguard the health and well being of the nation's children."

MERROW: Few fault the program's goal - to make sure that students have enough food in their stomachs to study and learn. Yet, there are a growing number of critics of school food programs.

BLAIR: Federal school lunch and breakfast programs help pay for meals for about 26 million school children every day. But many people say the

program is unsatisfactory. Students are probably the most vociferous critics, and they express their dissatisfaction by throwing the food away. Some experts estimate they're throwing away millions of dollars of food every year.

MERROW: We asked NPR reporters around the country to tell us about plate waste in their local schools. First, Tom Looker from Amherst, Massachusetts.

STUDENT: 4 grams for bread; a frankfurter is 25. Orange juice is 1.32 -- and 44 grams on the peas and carrots.

LOOKER: Now that's just about the full portion of peas and carrots, isn't it?

STUDENT: Yeah ... most of them are like that.

LOOKER: They're weighing garbage here in the kitchen of Amherst Regional Junior High School. Or, more scientifically stated, a group of researchers is measuring plate waste -- leftover food from a random sample of student trays. It's part of a federally funded project to demonstrate how well a computer can design school menus. But to get data for the computer programs about the amount of food kids are eating, a much less glamorous sort of research is necessary, requiring a set of scales, a couple of wooden spoons -and a few hearty researchers.

LOOKER: So you take out the trays here, and pour out the leftovers on a piece of waxed paper? Very appetizing work, eh?

BOY: I lose my appetite. And today, it will be all peas and carrots.

LOOKER: These peas and carrots can roll all over the place.

ED: Yeah. She can see certain things are easier to weigh than others, too. This isn't a bad meal. It's when you have potatoes, and spaghetti ... that gets a little grim sometimes.

LOOKER: How much garbage do you weigh each day?

ED: Well, we take in about between 50 and 60 trays. Now I can't tell you how much that is in pounds or anything ... that much.

LOOKER: That's about half a bucket full at the moment.

ED: At the moment ... another shift to go.

BOY: 41 for peas ... 39 for peas and carrots.

LOOKER: The garbage weighing is the tip of the iceberg. It's being used to check the success of the computerized menu program. David Rumpf of the University of Massachusetts is Director of the study -- and he

explains the overall project.

RUMPF: The actual ability to use computers to plan menus has been around for quite a while. It's -- you know, a matter of keeping track of the various nutrient requirements and the cost requirements, and the different thing and the exciting thing about this project is that it also keeps track of the students' preferences. The results have been that the participation in school lunches jumped by about 14% in this particular school, and the consumption of food eaten -- actually, what we've done is weigh it, so the difference in the average weight consumed per student meal has jumped by 10%. The students are getting more from their meal, and more students are getting a good hot school lunch meal.

LOOKER: The foods that students voted for include pizza, roast beef grinders, tacos, more ice cream and fewer vegetables. But Rumpf emphasizes that the computer considers nutrition as well as student preference. If tacos are now served at Amherst Junior High, it's because they contain a certain amount of green vegetables, in addition to being popular. The computer can incorporate into its suggested menus other constraints, such as introducing students to a certain number of unpopular foods each month -- hence, today's servings of peas and carrots. Rita Burnett, Food Service Director for the Amherst Schools, has worked with the computer for 9 months now.

RITA BURNETT

BURNETT: It has proven a number of points to me that I probably would have been reluctant to accept otherwise. Such things as repetition is very, very good ... youngsters liking more repetition rather than variety. My background tells me I should always provide variety and texture and flavor and probably every day ... and our experience with this computer planning system tells us that children like repetition, and it's not as unacceptable as we would like to think.

I was reluctant to try tacos, particularly -- just the thought of serving 900 tacos without any prior knowledge of how they would be accepted was very frightening, and we served roast beef grinders, which we had never served before -- and I was reluctant to spend the money on roast beef, wondering whether ... how much would be consumed and how much would not be ... and ... because of the study, it kind of forced our hand.

LOOKER: Do you have any sense, Ed, of how much garbage you weighed today?

ED: I think it was 1.84 pounds of hot dogs and rolls, 4.1 pounds of peas and carrots -- and three quarters of a pound of french fries.

LOOKER. Uh huh. So that's a total of what?

ED: 6.6 pounds about. It's a little bit more than normal because there were peas and carrots -- but normally, there's something or other that the kids don't like, so it'll get up there.

LOOKER: Now this is the final step in the research project. Just down the hatch with the garbage. It's served its purpose. It's about one bucket full. A very neat way of disposing of your research materials.

LOOKER: And ... for OPTIONS IN EDUCATION in Amherst, this is Tom Looker.

BLAIR: Excuse me, John. What's a "roast beef grinder?"

MERROW: That's a submarine sandwich in New England, Wendy. Let's check out the Midwest now. Here's Scott Simon in Chicago.

SCOTT SIMON

SIMON: The Chicago Tribune Task Force recently studied school lunches in Chicago, and found that 15% of an average approved healthful meal ends up by being pushed off of a plate and into a garbage can. How healthful can th'= lunchtime nutrition be if it's so often avoided, or so frequently tossed aside? In a city such as Chicago, the problem's often in the presentation. Most elementary schools don't have their own kitchens. The food is either frozen or brought in from a nearby school, and in most high schools which have their own kitchens, the food is purchased in large lots -- most of which is frozen. Lunches resulting may be overstored, overcooked -- and distinctly unappetizing, and also not all that nutritious. The Tribune survey found food analyzed in which the protein content had dwindled to half of what it was made to be. The longer food stays on the shelf, the less healthful it becomes -- and the ambiance of lunchtime is often not very inviting. Students who leave the school at lunch are probably able to feel a bit more adult at the fast food franchises. They can smoke and they can relax. Some of the attempts to improve lunch service have been along the lines resembling the cuisine of these places. Regulations have been relaxed so that hot dogs or hamburgers are now permitted, though the students complain that the taste and oatmeal additives used to extend the product.

Even the MacDonalds Corporation of Chicago has entered the food service market in selected suburban schools, providing their standard menu. They concede that the Big Macs aren't as nutritious as the government approved-type meal is on paper; they contend that their ingredients are fresher, and that the nutrients such as they are are digested, and not slid into the wastecan. This might succeed in having more students stay in school to eat, but these practices and proposals aren't necessarily advances. According to Northwestern University's nutritionist, Dr. Jeremiah Standler.

DR. JEREMIAH STANDLER

STANDLER: They are helping to create, reinforce, perpetuate bad eating habits -- so precisely, if they can get the kids to eat it, to that degree they are doing a progressively greater disservice. If there is plate waste, something is to be learned about it, but not the lesson that you serve an easy shortcut that which will be consumed in the present milieu, no matter how lousy nutritionally, on the excuse that the objective is to get the children to eat everything. I don't understand that at all. Why not serve a pint of ice cream, and make that the exclusive food. The odds are very good that the children would eat the whole pint of ice cream - and make that the whole meal. I don't understand that logic. It's totally illogical and indefensible.

SIMON: In the Chicago public schools, teachers are served different meals in different rooms. Their students, according to nutritionists like Dr. Standler, want to be doing more than injesting the proper amounts of protein, but should be learning the proper nutritional habits of a lifetime. But what of this problem -- how are students to be healthfully nourished in the middle of the day? Nourishment that demonstrably increases their learning ability and emotional outlook. According to the Chicago Tribune survey, as much as $600,000,000 worth of federally subsidized lunch food is annually being thrown into garbage cans, where it sits -- absolutely useless to anybody. This is Scott Simon in Chicago.

BLAIR: A recurring theme in reports on plate waste is that students' eating habits are already formed by the time they get to school.

MERROW: We have to ask ourselves over and over again, "Where do people learn about food?" The answer seems to be mostly at home and from television.

BLAIR: Let's go south now. Lloyd Gite reports on plate waste in Dallas.

STUDENT: If I wasn't hungry, you know ... I wouldn't eat up here. This food is terrible. You see, I took the wing out of this right here. And because ... and the wiener was cold, too -- not just outside.

GITE: That's a typical response that students give when they are asked what they think of the food that's served in their school cafeterias. The Dallas Independent School District, like most other school districts, says Mrs. Julia Brantley, who operates the district's food service program, is also plagued with the problem of plate waste.

MRS. JULIA BRANTLEY

BRANTLEY: During the management and technical assistance review which was conducted in the Dallas district in October of '75 by the federal officials and state officials, it was found that we had about 11% milk waste and 8% bread waste and 29% fruit and vegetable waste, overall, in the district. So you can see the greatest percentage of waste is in the fruit and vegetable category -- because there are many vegetables that children do not like to eat. So we do have a problem with waste in the Dallas schools.

GITE: When asked if they liked school cafeteria food, or why they throw so much of their meal away, students had a variety of answers.

STUDENT: This is good, but it could be better if it was a little hotter.

STUDENT: I feel that we should have a different menu from day to day, and not the same food, week after week.

STUDENT: They just don't serve you right. They serve you anything. They just give you anything ... they don't care.

STUDENT: They act like they don't ... french fries crazy and hamburger crazy.

STUDENT: I eat it -- but I don't like it!

STUDENT: Sometimes the food will be cold or half done.

STUDENT: It makes my stomach feel full ... gives me energy, so I can play football.

GITE: The National School Lunch Program is subsidized in part by the federal government and the United States Department of Agriculture has certain regulations that schools must adhere to in order to be reimbursed for the meals. The schools are reimbursed only for each Type A lunch they serve. The Type A lunch is defined by the USDA as a meal that contains prescribed portions of milk, vegetables, bread and meat or fish. Some say the strict regulations of the USDA at one time contributed to the high rate of plate waste. Mrs. Brantley says that school officials, as well as the easing of government regulations, is helping to curb plate waste.

BRANTLEY: We have this year in the secondary schools -- grade 9 through 12 -- we have introduced what we call a "combo type meal pattern" -- and that is, in addition to our regularly planned menu, we offer a hot sandwich -- for example, a hamburger or cheeseburger or a barbecue beef on bun and french fries as a choice. Also, in the grades 9 through 12, the new regulation, according to the United States Department of Agriculture is that these students do not have to take all 5 items on a Type A meal, and it still would qualify for reimbursement if they're on a free meal, and that kind of thing. They can take 3 -- and therefore, if they can make 3, it was done in an effort to reduce plate waste. This regulation. Therefore, if they would take 3 items that they know they're going to eat, as opposed to taking 5, knowing they aren't going to eat 2 of them, that would reduce the plate waste.

GITE: How successful has the combo plan been in reducing plate waste?

BRANTLEY: It was so successful in one of our high schools, that the man who picks up the garbage that's left each day that he uses in feeding his stock -- his pigs and so forth, he said he did not want to come by that school anymore to pick up the garbage because it was a waste of his time. So when I got a report like that, I felt good -- I felt as if the plate waste had been reduced, and we know it has increased our Type A lunch participation, because you see, whereas in one of our high schools last year, we might have been serving 2500 Type A lunches -- we increased to 4500, so it almost doubled. That's a better buy, economically for the student and it's better for us, because we get some reimbursement from the government for our Type A meals served.

GITE: Some students complain that plate waste is so high because the food is cold, the food is not cooked right, the food is too greasy. They have lots of complaints. Is the school district trying to deal with some of those complaints?

BRANTLEY: We have organized a student advisory committee for food services, and we realize that they're our customers, and if we want to keep them, we do need to try to please them. We always are open to receive calls, and we try to remedy any complaint that we have. Now, as far as ... I don't

believe we would ever be able to customize the meal for each individual as he goes through the line.

GITE: In spite of the efforts on the part of school officials and the USDA to curb the problems of plate waste, the fact still remains that millions of dollars of school food is thrown out each year. One report says that more students are turning away from school food all together. And an increasing number of fast food businesses are springing up around school campuses to take advantage of what some call the "student boycott of cafeteria food."

MERROW: Reporter Lloyd Gite, Station KERA in Dallas, Texas. It seems to be the same dilemma everywhere. Do you serve nutritious food that students will throw away, or do you serve them hamburgers and other food they like, but which may be less nutritious?

BLAIR: Actually, it's not even that simple. The fact is that a lot of the so called "nutritious" food is frozen -- like TV dinners, and not only is it less appetizing when it gets to the table -- it may also be less nutritious. Hamburgers and pizza, on the other hand, aren't toally without nutrition.

MERROW: The picture isn't all that bleak. In another southern city, Atlanta, Georgia, one school has a successful lunch program -- Nutra Lunch. Mike Bucki reports.

> It has wheat germ, sunflower seeds, some of the good things, such as that ... some vegetable. It furnishes a little over 4 ounces of protein and a fourth cup of vegetable. It's really ... if you eat that with a bun, it's a complete meal.

BUCKI: Since August of last year, students at 4 Fulton County high schools near Atlanta, have been packing in vitamins and minerals through the Nutra Lunch program -- an all natural addition to the regular menu. Sara Sloane, Food Service Director, had already introduced such options as a fast food line with hot dogs, regular hamburgers and french fries -- or a "trim a pound" lunch -- a beautifully prepared Chef's Salad, with ham, olives and the usual greenery. The Nutra Lunch program is another bag of choices by itself, as Sara Sloane describes.

SARA SLOANE

SLOANE: So we have, first of all, the Nutra-burger, than the baked potato, and the Nutra spread ... is served with the Nutra burger ...then today, also, we're featuring the sesame seed chicken ... and tossed salad and the CAROB cookie.

BUCKI: You have regular chicken, too, I assume.

SLOANE: Right. Regular chicken is on the ... the oven fried chicken is on the regular line. They serve themselves to the alfalfa sprouts. We also do a vegeterian plate, which is the sandwich -- vegetarian sandwich, with carrots, cucumbers, pickle, alfalfa sprouts, made on the high fiber bread. That's served with peanut butter cup, and a piece of fruit.

BUCKI: To qualify for federal subsidies, funding and bulk foodstuffs, all

of the lunch choices meet federal standards.

SLOANE: The United States Department of Agriculture subsidizes our program, so we operate within the framework of what is known as the Type A pattern. This means 2 ounces of ... a minimum of 2 ounces of protein, a minimum, 3/4 cup of fruit and/or vegetable; a serving of bread and milk. Those are the 5 components of the lunch. So, we can do all of this within the framework of what we are required to do. Now, at this school, we feed 90% of the students who are here.

BUCKI: That seems like a very ...

SLOANE: My high schools ... we have them as high as say, 96%, you know, so when they ... when you give them a choice of this, they're generally gonna find something that they like. We feel that the student needs this good basic lunch every day ... they need these foods; they need these raw foods, they need the fiber foods -- and we intend to give it to them within the framework of our federal program.

BUCKI: So we have essentially, 4 or 5 different lunches.

SLOANE: Right ...

BUCKI: For a cost of ...

SLOANE: Fifty cents per student.

BUCKI: The wealth of choices at the schools under Sara Sloane's supervision has increased lunch participation dramatically. Not only are vegetarians and health food afficianados by choice accommodated -- but also students and faculty who adhere to special diets for medical reasons are automatically satisfied by the Nutra lunch selections. But where does Sara Sloane get her ideas?

SLOANE: We use as the basic textbook the Deaf Smith Country Textbook, which is, I think, a good basic book for cooking with honey, using whole grain breads, alfalfa sprouts ... this kind of thing... then we use also the New York Times Natural Food Cookbook.

BUCKI: In addition to the cookbooks just mentioned, Mrs. Sloane challenges her food service personnel with Nutra cooking competitions. New recipes result, of course, but the competitions are also a sleight of hand method of winning over staid personnel to the new program. Previously, Mrs. Sloane told me, some of the women couldn't cook a pan of beans without tossing in a large slab of fatback or bacon. Well, those habits have not undergone a drastic metamorphosis. Sara Alford, Food Service Manager, Palmetto High School.

SARA ALFORD

ALFORD: I'm just excited about what they do ... every one of them. There's no one in this kitchen that does not really work hard to make what they prepare every day to look good and tasty.

BUCKI: And the salads look beautiful ...they really are ...

ALFORD: I mean, they talk about ... you know, what .. now let's see, what shall I do here, you know. And it's just like making, you know ...

cooking for a party. They know they want it to be pretty, and they want it to be good ...and it's just no problem.

BUCKI: And reaction from the clientele is largely favorable.

BUCKI: Well, I'm getting hungry!

SLOANE: Right!

BUCKI: Ken, I can't help but notice that you're eating the Nutra lunch ... why?

BOY: Because it's good!

BUCKI: Do you eat it often, or do you switch off, or what?

BOY; It's usually pretty good, but sometimes it has cottage cheese and stuff like that ... I don't much go for that. But when they have the chicken with sesame seeds and all, and when they have the Nutra burgers, it's usually pretty good.

BUCKI: How about your classmates? What do you find among them? What do they do?

BOY: Well, they tried the other day ... they tried some Nutra soup, and not too many ... they had to give little samples out, because not too many people would try it -- cause it was green. But it was really ... it tasted like vegetable soup .. but it was good. Not too many people ate any of it, but the Nutra burger is pretty popular.

BUCKI: Was there any thought among the guys in particular, that when the Nutra lunch first started, that this was kind of a sissy type food, or something like that?

BOY: Yeah ... kind of. In a way, but it's kind of gotten where ... they found out it was good, so they started eating it.

BUCKI: Were you skeptical when she first started the program?

WOMAN: As a matter of fact, I was. I kind of had the feeling that maybe everything would taste like soy -- you know, relatively tasteless, but this is not the case. It's a blend of flavors, and it's delicious.

BUCKI: Have you ever tried the Nutra lunch?

BOY: No.

BUCKI: Why not?

BOY: I don't think it'd be any good.

BUCKI: How do you know until you try?

BOY: I don't know.

BUCKI: Have you ever tried the Nutra lunch?

BOY: Yeah.

BUCKI: What do you think of it?

BOY: I don't like it.

BUCKI: There are, of course, a few skeptics, yet to be sold on the Nutra lunch program -- but Fulton County parents are fortunate that the nutrition needs of their children, while in school, are in the very capable hands of people like Sara Alford and Sara Sloane. In Atlanta, reporting for OPTIONS IN EDUCATION, this is Mike Bucki.

COMMERCIAL FOR DANNON YOGURT

BLAIR: Health foods are sweeping the country ... supposedly. And you know that program in Atlanta, Georgia sounded pretty good to me. I'd like to have lunch there.

MERROW: The problem is that programs like that are pretty rare. Lots of school districts are consolidating their school kitchens, meaning that one kitchen serves several schools around the city. The food is prepared in this large, corporate-like kitchen, and sent to other schools where it's reheated and served.

BLAIR: Yes ... it's easier and cheaper for schools, which don't need large staffs and kitchens then. Unfortunately, the results aren't always satisfactory.

MERROW: Next week, we'll report on some inner city schools where I went to eat breakfast and lunch with students.

BLAIR: A lot of parents are angry about the trends in school food. I talked with parent activist Rosalie Sanchez, who formed a group in Maryland, known as "Back to Basic Foods." This group went to the Montgomery County PTA to fight to keep pre-plated food out of schools.

ROSALIE SANCHEZ

SANCHEZ: "Pre-plated ..."

BLAIR: That means like something you get on airlines ... is that?

SANCHEZ: Yeah ... or in the frozen food section of the supermarket. These foods are cooked somewhere else, you know, miles away from the school site ... they're frozen, they're sent to schools, and sometimes not used for as much as 6 months. They're then distributed to local schools from the central school, combined with -- let's call it a salad -- it's usually some little bit of green lettuce like an iceberg ...

BLAIR: Pale green.

SANCHEZ: Yeah ... very pale, you know, there isn't too much in it. And the individual school then heats the little TV dinners up, and dishes them out. They look like little trays of dog food, actually, They're not

even as appetizing as ... and I don't want to mean that they're appetizing, but they're not even as appetizing as those that you do pick up at the supermarket.

BLAIR: What is the balance on them? They are worked out by some kind of dietician, aren't they?

SANCHEZ: Yes. They do follow the Department of Agriculture guidelines. Most of the time, the protein sauce is a meat, and it's usually beef with an extender added -- something like the texturized vegetable protein, which is up for scrutiny now, because the process used to turn the soy into this form results in a high concentration of sodium, which doctors are saying -- if given to children early in life, could possibly aggravate hypertensive conditions. Included with this meat is a potato of sorts. Now, the potato is supposed to contain all the vitamins of a fresh, let's say, baked potato -- but in actuality, what the children get is a very depleted potato, but the school doesn't have to account for the fact that the potato -- when the children receive it, is very different in nutritive value from that that the potato originally started as. All they have to say is "A potato was served. This is one of the vegetables ... here it is."

The fact that these potatoes are dehydrated, reconstituted, then shaped into a form -- either that of a french fry, that of a "tater tot" -- that's a small, round shape -- and then fried, or you know, the mashed variety of that dehydrated, reconstituted type of potato. Then, placed in this packet with the meat, then frozen, and then it's sent to the schools. The schools then reheat the food, maybe 6 months later -- to the readiness of the meat, which means that the potato by that time, is often burned. And then served to the children. By that time, the nutitive value of the potato is almost nil. What they usually serve is this lettuce, which they cut up early in the morning and place in little cups, and they serve that along with a package --a small plastic package of dressing, and we've tried to find out what is in the dressing, because if you look at your supermarket shelves at your dressings, you'll find that there's a high concentration of additives and preservatives.

And we don't know if this is what the children are getting. We've asked, but we get answers like "We don't know what's in there." That's the stock answer ... andwe feel that that's an irresponsible answer, because shoppers today want to know what's in their food. We take the time to read the labels.

BLAIR: Are the servings large, small, medium?

SANCHEZ: They're all the same. Now, if you talk to a first grader, he will tell you that the serving is large. He throws most of the lunch away ... perhaps because he doesn't like it, but also because it might be too much for him. The sixth grader says that if he liked it, he really could eat 2 of those. When we had our cook, the cook was able to portion out the food on a tray, according to the size and need of the child. You know, that's eliminated with this kind of a lunch.

MERROW: Rosalie Sanchez, Head of "Back to Basic Food" in Montgomery County, Maryland.

BLAIR: Rosalie Sanchez believes that parents are concerned and

knowledgeable. Let's go back to the grocery store with reporter David Selvin, as he looked at the groceries some parents were buying there.

SELVIN: Were you reading the ingredients, or how to make it?

WOMAN: The ingredients. Well, I usually read the ingredients. This time, I was reading both. I need to make something quick to take to go to a bake sale tomorrow.

SELVIN: Is there anything that you could read on that package that would make you not want to buy it?

WOMAN: On this particular package?

SELVIN: On any package, I guess.

WOMAN: Yes. On baby food, I'm very ... I have an infant 6 months old ...and baby food, I'm really, you know ... I read the labels on that ... sugar and salt that's added to baby food.

SELVIN: Are you less careful about the things that you buy for yourself, maybe?

WOMAN: Less careful than I am for the baby. To be honest, I am.

SELVIN: But how about things like sodium nitrites and red dye number 2, and ...

WOMAN: Well, my daughter loves baloney, and I know it's bad. I have a package of bacon I've had in my refrigerator now for months, because I don't want to cook it. I'm gonna throw it out, probably, sometime. But I won't ... I haven't used bacon since I read an article where it told about the heat with the bacon causing the problem.

SELVIN: Me, too. That was about 3 months ago. And I love bacon.

WOMAN: I bought it ... and I love it, too, and I ... I don't know ... I'm kind of squeamish.

SELVIN: But it does make you stay away from it, though.

WOMAN: Yes. Yeah. My problem right now is with the saccharine. I just don't know what to do about that.

SELVIN: Well, on a lot of these boxes, there'll be ingredients on them that I've never heard of, quite frankly, and I assume that most other people haven't. Do you think there's a problem, maybe, in the amount of information that we have about what goes into ...

WOMAN: I don't know if there's a lack. I think there's a lack of consumer information, and what is told to us kind of scares you ... because the whole story isn't told, or else it's not told in terms that the layman can understand. I think there's a great lack of information flow.

SELVIN: On principle, do you try to stay away from chemical names ... that you don't know what they are?

WOMAN: In food, to be honest ... I haven't really done that much. Maybe it's laziness, I don't ... I don't know ... it hasn't killed me yet!

SELVIN: Thank you very much. I really think about this.

MUSICAL ADVERTISEMENT FOR PILLSBURY

SABRY: Well, I think ... quite often, you go into cafeterias, and the first item in the line is usually the dessert items, and they are usually these yukky, gukky kind of rich desserts -- and if you go in, obviously because you're hungry; it's mealtime, you're likely to fill up on this. By the time that you get down the line to the main dish, which is likely to be more balanced nutritionally than the dessert would be, you, in fact, find that you already on your tray have too much. The whole line is behind you, so even if you want to change your mind and go back and put something in there, that, in fact, it becomes very difficult.

FREMES: I go back to my original argument, and that is that a parent, a teacher, a school board, has no right allowing children to choose foods that are unhealthy for them -- such as high fat foods and unbalanced diets. There's no place for it in the school. If it is in the school, the parent has an obligation to fight its being in the school, or to teach his child the value of good food.

MERROW: Nutritionist and broadcaster Ruth Fremes, and Dr. Zak Sabry, head of a national study of nutrition in Canada -- are co-authors of a book called Nutriscore. It's designed to help readers rate foods according to their nutrients, so they can tell what vitamins, minerals, proteins, etc., they're not getting. Fremes and Sabry believe parents should fight to get good food into school -- but they told Wendy that the problem is much larger than school lunch programs.

RUTH FREMES

FREMES: For instance, puddings that are made with thickeners and gells and stabilizers and sold in little cans for kids to take to school every day, day after day, having monosodiumglutamate added to 200 or 300 items in the supermarket so that in a day, you can get enough to have sensitive people get sick without knowing why.

DR. ZAK SABRY

SABRY: We now expect that food that is supposed to have a subtle sweetness to have pronounced sweetness -- I mean, there would be no mistake that it is sweet and very sweet -- food that is supposed to be red, we expect it to

very red. Food that is supposed to be crunchy, we want it loud and clear that it is crunchy. So ... and because our expectations change, industry produces the kind of food that meets these expectations.

FREMES: Yeah. It's not that industry is the ogre. It's that I really don't believe that they understand, or care to understand, or have looked at the nutritional implications of what they're doing to the food supply because the average consumer has not extracted that kind of commitment from industry.

SABRY: There's considerable peer pressure among kids -- and obviously, they are attracted to what's being advertised most heavily, and advertising has a lot to do with what the kids will choose, and what they will influence each other to choose.

FREMES: That's only if the parents don't interject. You will find kids are critical of ads if they have some knowledge -- they'll look at those sugared cereals, and they say, "But that's not good for me, Mom, is it?" And if Mom cares, she'll say, "No, it isn't" -- and they'll know the value isn't there.

BLAIR: Tell us in general -- very quickly -- what is the power of advertising over our nutrition habits?

FREMES: Oh, it's the only education we've had since Betty Crocker came on the scene! And you'll notice, too, that the manufacturers have learned that nutrition is a selling tool; that they are advertising nutrition

BLAIR: Perhaps since the nutrition disclosure laws on packages.

FREMES: That may be so, but they're using it as another tool -- that isn't necessarily advertising nutritious foods; they're using nutrition as a selling tool.

MERROW: Ruth Fremes and Dr. Zak Sabry, co-authors of a book called Nutriscore.

SELVIN: Do you have any favorite kind of food?

WOMAN: All food is my favorite!

SELVIN: Can you remember what you had for breakfast this morning?

WOMAN: Yeah. I had sausage and fried eggs and toast and coffee.

SELVIN: You do like food!

WOMAN: Uh huh.

SELVIN: Do you have any favorite kind of food?

CHILD: Spaghetti!

SELVIN: You go to school. Do they serve you lunch in school?

CHILD: Yeah.

SELVIN: Does it concern you what she eats in school?

PARENT: Well, they eat a real well balanced meal at school, because I get, you know, the menu.

SELVIN: Yeah. When you go shopping, do you look ... do you read the ingredients?

PARENT: Yeah ... pretty much so. I'm getting more aware of this now. Like ... you know, in cooking oils, and, say, in butters and margarines ... like the low fat.

SELVIN: You've got a loaf of bread here that has something called mono and diglycerides calcium proprionate...

PARENT: Yeah.

SELVIN: Do you know what those things are?

PARENT: No, I don't. I don't have the slightest idea.

SELVIN: Does it bother you that you don't know what you're eating?

PARENT: No ... no ... not ... well, maybe - but I don't know where you would ever find out, so therefore, I just get it.

SELVIN: Yeah ... that's ... is that really a problem, I mean, finding out what some of these things are?

PARENT: Yeah, that's a problem, but ... like I said, if I'm aware of it, then I'll look for it. If I'm not, then, I guess, sometimes ignorance is a bliss!

BLAIR: David Selvin, talking with grocery shoppers.

MERROW: Most people don't believe that the food industry is entirely responsible for our bad eating habits. Maybe it's only responding to what we want - but there's no question that industry does have a lot to do with what foods we have to choose from.

BLAIR: Did you know, for instance, that Amy Carter and her classmates at Stephens Elementary School in Washington, D.C. eat food prepared by ITT? That's right! Morton Foods is a subsidiary of International Telephone and Telegraph. According to syndicated columnist, Jack Anderson, Morton's specializes in TV Dinners and also provide the food for Stephens Elementary. The kids get "meal packs" there -- a smaller kind of poor man's TV Dinner.

MERROW: The food is made in a factory in Virginia, where trays pass up and down in an assembly line, as mashed potatoes and butter squirt from faucets. Morton has also come up with a super nutritious dougnut -- it's supposed to supply school children with many of the vitamins found in a home cooked breakfast, but to hold the vitamins in, the doughnut is loaded with extra fat. And to keep it from going rancid, preservatives are added.

BLAIR: And that's all done for our convenience. And the more of this kind of food we get, the more we probably expect. Children learn about food in part through what they get at school -- and, of course, through advertising.

MUSICAL ADVERTISEMENT FOR KENTUCKY FRIED CHICKEN

BLAIR: One way to get students to eat better is to teach them more about food and nutrition. But we know that doesn't happen too often.

MERROW: Schools are faced with a dilemma. No matter how hot and fresh peas and carrots are, they still are peas and carrots.

BLAIR: To compete with the kinds of foods students buy off campus, schools now offer hamburgers, french fries and pizza. For example, the Benton Arkansas High School was losing a thousand dollars a month on its hot lunch program, because only 10% of the students ate in the cafeteria. So, Benton High invited McDonalds in -- and now 60% of the students show up for lunch every day.

MERROW: And with most schools in a budget crunch, that kind of decision becomes more understandable.

BLAIR: Another moneymaker for schools is the vending machine, which distributes candy bars, potato chips and soft drinks. There's parental pressure, however, to keep these machines out of schools. Karen Shugrue reports on the situation here in Washington, D.C.

MORLAND: Education is not just math and science. It's a lot more, and it has to do with nutrition as well.

SHUGRUE: Gina Morland is editor of Nutrition Action, a publication of the Center for Science in The Public Interest in Washington, D.C. Morland says the ban on so-called "junk food" in vending machines in the D.C. public schools is considered a successful one, but has run into what have come to be common roadblocks to this form of forced nutrition. The uproar over the removal of candy, potato chips, popcorn, chewing gum and soft drinks from the vending machines came not when it was being debated by the D.C. School Board back in March of '75 -- but when it was implemented a year and a half later at the beginning of this school year. Board President, Dr. Thurmond Evans, a pediatrician and the sponsor of the junk food resolution, says the ban is still encountering some attitude problems.

DR. THURMOND EVANS

EVANS: The reaction is, "Well, well ..." you know, "we can get the same stuff right outside the school across the street, so why not get it in the school? Well, it's not really that bad for you, so why not?" I mean ..

SHUGRUE: It's not gonna kill you.

EVANS: Yeah ... it's not gonna kill you. Now, at least. So, why not ... then, things like ... "I'm 18, I'm 17, I'm 16 ... I've been deciding since I was -- however old -- what I should and should not eat."

SHUGRUE: Complaints from students were to be expected, so were the cries of the vending machine companies which have lost a big client in the schools and contend that the junk food is actually high energy food. But in some schools, the teachers have gotten around the ban by having soft drink and candy machines moved into their private lounge. And, there were parents who objected to the ban. They say the School Board is telling our kids what to eat. They're intefering with their freedom of choice. Food activist Gina Morland answers them this way:

MORLAND: When we put a junk food ban in a school system, certainly there's no choice left between junk foods and non junk foods. The choice that still remains is choosing between yogurt, or unsalted nuts or an apple -- there's still choice involved; it's just that the choice is all good food. When you think about it, the food advertising industry spends billions of dollars every year making us think that what's good for us to eat are Fiddle Faddle and Ding Dongs and Devil Dongs and sugar candied popcorn cereals. We can't really compete with that on the media level --but in schools, we can definitely have an impact.

SHUGRUE: The Center for Science in the Public Interest gives what it calls the "Juicy Tomato Award" each year - to an individual or group whose work aids in the improvement of the American diet. Last year, the "Juicy Tomato" went to the West Virginia Board of Education, for its ban on junk food in the schools. But that ban is now being challenged. The reason -- the schools have lost the money they used to make from the vending machines which paid for everything from baseball uniforms to diplomas. The D.C. schools have come up with a solution to that loss.

EVANS: For our secondary schools, the Board of Education has decided to set up a, you know, a pot of money for each one of them, on which they can draw ... something, you know, approximately, 2 to 3 to $4,000 per school, which will help correct or deal with some of that .. the deficit that would occur.

SHUGRUE: D.C. School Board President, Dr. Thurmond Evans, admits the dispute over the junk food ban could have been avoided if it had been given more publicity and preparation than the cursory two public hearings. For National Public Radio, I'm Karen Shugrue in Washington.

MERROW: Karen Shugrue mentioned the "Juicy Tomato Award" that went to West Virginia for banning junk food vending machines in its schools. But the ban is under fire at home. Tom Burger reports.

TOM BURGER

BURGER: When West Virginia schools opened for business last Fall, the soft drink machines did not. After nearly 10 years of study, the state school board implemented a ban on in-school sales of candy, soft drinks, chewing gum, and flavored ice bars such as popsicles. The Board's action merited the "Juicy Tomato Award" -- and the praises of health professionals; but it also stirred controversy among school administrators, students, and even the West Virginia Legislature.

> Quite possibly, you could have the principal come out every morning, and take the machines and hide them in his office, or something, or do something to turn the machines around, or plug them up so that you couldn't sell candy half the day, or you couldn't sell soda pop or whatever, and we decided that if they're allowed to eat candy all day long, there's no prohibition against that -- then why prohibit their selling candy?
>
> PRESIDENT: Senator
>
> SENATOR: Mr. President ... now, I just ask you -- are you concerned about the welfare of the kids or the welfare of the vendors?

BURGER: When the debate ended, lawmakers passed a bill which would allow the sale of non nutritious foods in high schools after the lunch period . However, West Virginia Governor Jay Rockefeller has yet to sign the bill. The heaviest pressure against the ban came from vending machine operators. They said the sale of fruit juices instead of soft drinks was hurting their business. Some school principals were also upset because their share of vending machine profits was falling, jeopardizing some extracurricular school activities. State School Superintendent Dan Taylor said he sympathized with the principals, but he still supported the school board policy.

DAN TAYLOR

TAYLOR: I think the concern was legitimate. My own feeling is that they've got their priorities very much out of order. In my view, it just doesn't seem reasonable or justifiable to raise money for any good cause at the expense of students' teeth.

BURGER: A State Senator from West Virginia's Tyler County, Bill Gilligan, said the issue was not lost profits -- but basic human rights.

BILL GILLIGAN

GILLIGAN: We're being regulated to death by people who aren't elected to public office - they're appointed people. And I don't think they have any right to tell me that my children may or may not buy candy in schools -- the issue is not candy; the issue is not pop -- the issue is human rights.

BURGER: State Senator, Bill Gilligan. School Superintendent Taylor said that school is the only place left where children can be taught healthy eating habits. I'm Tom Burger.

BLAIR: Now to the West Coast. Gilroy, California, to be exact.

BALTEZORE: In February, the Administration began the gradual elimination of all junk food from the 9 schools in the district. Under the new regulation, no food item classified in the low nutritional category can be sold at any school or any school event. Vance Baldwin, Superintendent, says Gilroy is a perfect district in which to implement this program. First, with only 5700 students, the loss of revenue from junk food sales is minimal. But secondly -- and most importantly -- a nutritional lunch is vital to many of the students. Twenty-seven percent of them come from poor families who are receiving aid to families with dependent children. And their meal at school may be the only bit of nutrition they get all day. At Gilroy High School, a few students have boycotted the cafeteria in protest -- and have left the campus at noon to buy soft drinks, potato chips and candy elsewhere.

Even the Forensic Squad at the high school has gotten into the act. On April 11th, the debaters forewent the usual dry topics of politics and foreign affairs, and argued the merits of banning junk food at school. The affirmative leader is Chris Burtelli.

BURTELLI: I read in one place that if students would change their eating habits as late as adolescence, they might be able to save their teeth -- which is almost enough reason right there to abolish -- or not sell; not make it available. And I also read ... a home economics professor from

Massachusetts, before a conference on schools and physicians or something like that -- said that snacking instead of eating meals, is becoming a growing trend among adolescents, especially, and their choice of snacks is determined more often by availability rather than concern for nutritional value.

BALTEZORE: On the negative side, Chuck Larson argued for the rights of students.

LARSON: I feel that the students should be given the responsibility of deciding what kinds of foods they want. The perfect decision for our school -- for the Administration to make -- along with the students and the teachers and the community around -- everybody involved in this decision, is to have both the nutritional foods and the junk foods, and I would be willing to bet that very soon, the so-called "very good nutritional foods" are going to start selling more than the junk foods.

BALTEZORE: The school district claims the response from parents and teachers has been positive. They've also gotten letters from school districts throughout the country who want to implement similar programs. One of these days, they may even be able to convince the students!

STUDENT: I don't think it's right, because the students should make up their mind whether to eat the junk food or not.

STUDENT: I don't think they should tell us what to eat. They already restricted us to a whole mess of stuff. I mean, we have to take certain credits and stuff. Now, they're gonna tell us what to eat?

BALTEZORE: For OPTIONS IN EDUCATION, I'm Jay Baltezore in Gilroy, California.

MERROW: Well, it sounds as if some schools are trying to do something about nutrition. They're teaching nutrition education, they've banned junk food -- and they're trying to improve what's available in the cafeteria.

BLAIR: All these things in the teeth of budget restrictions, and the need for convenience and efficiency. And despite what schools do about nutrition, they probably can't compete with other forces in society.

MUSICAL ADVERTISEMENT FOR RC COLA

SELVIN: Can you remember what you had for breakfast this morning?

WOMAN: I didn't have anything -- I'm on a diet!

SELVIN: How about lunch?

WOMAN: Nothing.

SELVIN: You must have had dinner last night.

WOMAN: Yes, I did. I had a very large tuna salad.

SELVIN: Tell me something ... do you have a favorite kind of food?

WOMAN: I like almost all kinds of foods.

SELVIN: I notice you've got a lot of vegetables, and fruit and good bread in there. Do you try to stay away from things with strange sounding ingredients and ....

WOMAN: No, not really. I try to stay away from sweets -- carbohydrates, but once in awhile we go on a binge.

BLAIR: David Selvin -- talking with shoppers in a grocery store.

MERROW: Other material for this program came from Tom Burger, Station WVPB, Beckley, West Virginia, Karen Shugrue in Washington, D.C.; Jay Baltezore, in Gilroy, California; Lloyd Gite, Station KERA, Dallas, Texas; Tom Looker in Amherst, Massachusetts; Mike Bucki, Station WABE, Atlanta, Georgia -- and Scott Simon in Chicago.

BLAIR: And my colleague, John Merrow, has been having breakfast and lunch in New York City. Not at the Four Seasons, but at schools -- in Brooklyn and Chinatown and Harlem. Be sure and join us next week for Part 2 of this special report on nutrition.

MERROW: So you'll hear from lots of school kids, and also from policy makers here in Washington. I hope you'll join us.

MUSICAL ADVERTISEMENT FOR KEEBLER COOKIES

BLAIR: This program is produced by Jo Ellyn Rackleff and John Merrow. The Assistant Producer is Katharine Ferguson. Production assistance by Keith Talbot. Technical assistance by Dave Harris.

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BLAIR: If you'd like transcripts of this 2 part series on Nutrition, send one dollar to National Public Radio -- Education, Washington, D.C. 20036. Ask for program number 75 and 76.

MERROW: If you'd like cassettes of the 2 programs to play at home or at school, send $10. Our address again -- National Public Radio -- Educatic Washington, D.C. 20036.

BLAIR: And don't forget to tell us the call letters of your local National Public Radio station. I'm Wendy Blair.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow ... and this is NPR ... National Public Radio.

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